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## Viewing cable 06BEIRUT2643, JUMBLATT CONCEDES VICTORY TO NASRALLAH, WORRIES

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">06BEIRUT2643</a>	<a href="#">2006-08-15 08:37</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">SECRET//NOFORN</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Beirut</a>

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SUBJECT: JUMBLATT CONCEDES VICTORY TO NASRALLAH, WORRIES  
ABOUT COUP D'ETAT AND THREATS

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Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (S/NF) On 8/14, the Ambassador spent an unrelentingly bleak evening with Walid Jumblatt, Marwan Hamadeh, Ghattas Khoury, and (joining late) Bernard Emie. Nasrallah's televised "victory speech" cast a pall over the discussion, with honking horns and cheering Shia making a ruckus on the nearby Beirut corniche. Jumblatt predicted that, whatever the physical losses and casualties to Lebanon, it would be impossible to reverse the appalling image of a victorious Hizballah, with grassroots organizational abilities greater than expected. Jumblatt sharply criticized Israeli actions, claiming that the Israelis had succeeded only in weakening the state and "turning Siniora into Abu Mazen," while increasing Hizballah's appeal in Lebanon and beyond. Admitting to having no good ideas, the Lebanese fretted about how to overcome Hizballah's now transparent defiance about disarmament. Hamadeh in particular worried about news stories that Hamadeh interpreted as death threats to March 14 politicians and Ambassador Feltman. The Lebanese predicted that a scheduled speech by Syrian President Bashar al-Asad on 8/15 would escalate internal Lebanese tensions.

¶2. (S/NF) The Syrian-Iranian-Hizballah line, Jumblatt argued, is that the March 14 politicians had intentionally egged on Israel to strengthen themselves at the expense of their opponents, and now the March 14 politicians must be punished. This line of reasoning makes it difficult for the cabinet and parliamentary majority to confront Hizballah directly, without appearing to be colluding with Israel. If the Christians, Druse, and Sunnis would stand together against Hizballah's weapons, maybe Nasrallah would have second thoughts, Jumblatt argued. Unfortunately, Michel Aoun still provides Hizballah Christian cover, and the Sunnis, including Saad Hariri, are too frightened of Sunni-Shia clashes to stand firm. Terrified March 14 Christians will soon start rebuilding links with Syria. Jumblatt vowed to continue to speak the truth about Hizballah, but he was deeply pessimistic about whether he would have much of an impact or even survive. End summary.

DOWNBEAT MARCH 14 MOOD,  
WHILE HIZBALLAH CELEBRATES

¶3. (S/NF) Minister of Telecommunications Marwan Hamadeh (Druse, allied with Jumblatt) hosted what turned out to be a three-hour dinner and downbeat discussion on 8/14 for Walid Jumblatt, former MP Ghattas Khoury (now an advisor to Saad Hariri), Ambassador Feltman, and -- joining late -- French Ambassador Bernard Emie. The evening started with the guests watching, live, Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah's televised "victory speech." Almost immediately after the speech, the nearby Beirut corniche filled with honking horns and cheering Hizballah supporters, celebrating -- for hours -- the victory declared by their leader. The ebullient mood on the streets outside Hamadeh's seaview apartment contributed to the unrelentingly bleak mood of the March 14 figures inside, as other March 14 politicians called Hamadeh, Jumblatt, and Khoury intermittently throughout the evening to express fear -- and, in a few cases, a desire to quit Lebanon altogether. While the three Lebanese agree with the two ambassadors that it was, on one level, absurd to claim victory in a war that cost Lebanon thousands of casualties and billions of dollars in physical losses, they also insisted that it will be impossible to reverse the impression of victory over Israel.

NASRALLAH'S SPEECH SEEN  
AS COUP D'ETAT THROUGH AID  
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¶4. (S/NF) Hamadeh, Jumblatt, and Khoury all had the same interpretation of Nasrallah's speech: "l'etat, c'est moi," Jumblatt quoted Napoleon. This "coup d'etat" was symbolized by Nasrallah's financial commitments to give each displaced persons thousands of dollars to rebuild homes, replace furniture, rent temporary shelter for a year, and so forth. While Jumblatt vowed to raise his voice asking where Nasrallah is getting such lavish sums, he did not expect that he would have much impact on those who will see Nasrallah as their savior, not as the one who delivered calamity to them.

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In terms of reconstruction, Nasrallah only mentioned the state in passing, putting himself and Hizballah as bigger, greater, more generous, more rapid than the state, Hamadeh lamented. The Lebanese will remember who built their home, who paid for rent on temporary shelter, who replaced their lost furniture -- and while the state struggles to find funds to rebuild roads and vital infrastructure that will take longer to replace and not be seen as gifts by the population gratified by Hizballah's cash subsidies. "You might as well forget working in the south," Khoury said to Emie and Ambassador Feltman; "Hizballah will be finished by the time you get moving."

PERCEIVED THREATS IN SPEECH,  
INTERNET ARTICLE, NEWSPAPER  
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¶5. (S/NF) The Lebanese also worried that Nasrallah's speech contained an implicit threat against the March 14 politicians, when Nasrallah made vague references to ministers who had questioned "the resistance" in cabinet sessions. While pleading with his guests not to let his long-term, live-in, and worried girlfriend know, Hamadeh distributed a text he said was from a Syrian internet site that was more explicit in the threat. According to this text, which cited sources close to Israeli Justice Minister Haim Ramon, Hamadeh had gone to Ambassador Feltman with the whereabouts of Hassan Nasrallah, to be passed to the Israelis in order to kill Nasrallah. The enormous explosions (that even shook the embassy compound, miles away) on 8/12 in the southern suburbs were, according to this article, a result of Hamadeh's messages to Ambassador Feltman. (We will send an informal Embassy translation of this article septel.)

¶6. (S/NF) Jumblatt and Khoury also raised the first issue of al-Akhbar, a revived newspaper in Beirut that appeared that morning and is presumed (accurately, we believe) to have Iranian funding. In an article nestled next to a glowing profile of, and interview with, Michel Aoun, former as-Safir editor Ibrahim Amin wrote that Hamadeh, Minister of Social Affairs Nayla Mouawad, and Minister of Industry Pierre Gemayel are a "Golani brigade" within the GOL that coordinates with Ambassador Feltman how to disarm the heroic resistance. Hamadeh interpreted these articles as "death threats" to himself, Mouawad, and Gemayel, as well as Ambassador Feltman.

RUMORS THAT THE MARCH 14 MOVEMENT  
PLOTTED THE ISRAELI ATTACKS  
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¶7. (S/NF) Noting that Syrian President Bashar al-Asad is scheduled to deliver a speech on 8/15, Jumblatt predicted that the rhetoric would escalate, in hopes of provoking internal conflict inside Lebanon. The theme of the Hizballah-Syrian-Iranian arguments, he said, was that the March 14 politicians had helped the Israelis plan the war in order to strengthen themselves at the expense of Hizballah and the Shia. An Israeli-American-March 14 plot had wrecked Lebanon. The kidnapping of the two soldiers was a pretext,

seized by March 14 politicians and the Israelis to implement a script written out long before. Now that the Israelis have failed to disarm Hizballah, the March 14 politicians are trying to find ways to do it themselves. All of these arguments, Jumblatt said, constitute a threat to the March 14 politicians physically. All the Syrians have to do is kill eight MPs, Khoury added, and the March 14 majority in the parliament disappears. How ironic, Hamadeh noted, that the March 14 politicians are being blamed for the Israeli actions, when the March 14 movement is "the biggest political loser in this whole affair."

FLUMMOXED ABOUT HOW  
TO GET HIZBALLAH TO DISARM  
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18. (S/NF) During much of the evening, the Lebanese talked among themselves about what to do regarding Hizballah's now clear refusal to disarm, despite Hizballah's acceptance both of UNSCR 1701 and Siniora's seven points. Khoury noted that Nasrallah's speech had one advantage: Hizballah's position was no longer ambiguous. While Nasrallah talked about the resistance's support for the LAF and how Hizballah would cooperate with the LAF, Nasrallah also associated calls for disarmament with sedition. Addressing Ambassador Feltman,

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the three Lebanese noted that Nasrallah in his speech continued to use Shebaa Farms as a pretext, since (in their view) "you blocked a solution" to Shebaa. The Ambassador and the Lebanese rehashed the familiar arguments over Shebaa Farms, with the Lebanese insisting (as always) that we were inexplicably incapable of seeing how our position strengthened Hizballah, Syria, and Iran.

19. (S/NF) Jumblatt thought that the Israelis were in "too much of a hurry to leave," for, once the Israelis are out of Lebanon, in his view, a major pressure point on Hizballah is removed. In Jumblatt's view, Hizballah is not in the mood right now to attack the IDF, even inside Lebanon, but having the Israelis inside is an embarrassment to Hizballah. "We can ask, 'why is Israel occupying part of Lebanon?'" Jumblatt explained. The Israelis no longer seemed insistent on waiting until the arrival of an expanded UNIFIL, Hamadeh said, describing a briefing he had received from the Lebanese general who had participated in an IDF-UNIFIL-LAF meeting in Naqoura earlier that day. Hamadeh said that many Israelis had already departed Lebanon and wanted to begin a more formal handover to UNIFIL as early as 8/16, well before any new UNIFIL troops would be ready to go. "How is it that Israel can insist on a new multinational force, but then they end up just leaving the same old UNIFIL to take over?" Khoury asked. (Note: Emie did not comment, but we have heard from UNIFIL sources that some new French troops might, in fact, be ready as early as this week. End note.)

WONDERING WHETHER LAF DEPLOYMENT  
IS A GOOD IDEA, IF HIZBALLAH REMAINS  
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110. (S/NF) So the March 14 politicians face a difficult choice, Jumblatt and Hamadeh agreed. They can proceed with supporting LAF deployment, per the cabinet decision, but a deployment that seems to be going more quickly than they had thought it would. Given that Hizballah fighters have surely melted back into the returning population and have not turned over their heavy weaponry, that sets up the LAF as the address for the next Israeli military strike against Lebanon -- meaning that the LAF will be either destroyed or turned into an antagonist on the side of Hizballah. Or the March 14 politicians could try to get the cabinet to delay LAF deployment, which would result in losing the historic opportunity to deploy the LAF to the Blue Line and would allow restoration of the status quo ante, with Hizballah in charge. The political cost of reversing a cabinet decision that showed promise of getting Israelis out of Lebanon would be unacceptably high, Hamadeh said, opening the March 14

crowd up to more charges of collusion with Israel.

¶11. (S/NF) Emie and Ambassador Feltman talked about the deployment of the beefed-up UNIFIL being linked to some kind of Hizballah disarmament, but Jumblatt, giving his signature shrug, asked why that would be pressure on Hizballah, if the Israelis have already departed anyway. "So what if the new UNIFIL never comes? The Israelis are out. The army is in the south." Emie and Ambassador Feltman also reminded the Lebanese of the UN Secretary General's requirement to report within a week on the cessation of hostilities and within a month on the broader issues, including disarmament issue. The 30-day report will certainly focus on the disarmament question. Clearly not expecting an answer, Jumblatt asked whether the Secretary General's new report will have any more force than the previous reports on UNSCR 1559. Emie and Ambassador Feltman prodded the Lebanese on a "moment of truth" regarding Hizballah's arms, but Hamadeh, Jumblatt, and Khoury thought that provoking that moment of truth now would hand Hizballah a clear victory. "We need to wait at least until 'the celebrations' are over," Jumblatt said.

#### HIZBALLAH'S ORGANIZATIONAL SURVIVAL GREATER THAN ANTICIPATED

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¶12. (S/NF) The Lebanese also spoke in frightened awe of the organizational abilities of Hizballah. Despite having so much of the Hizballah physical infrastructure destroyed -- office buildings, clinics, schools, charitable institutions all in ruins -- Hizballah was nevertheless able to mobilize bulldozers to clear roads in the south. Pointing to the Lebanese television coverage of the situation in the south flickering in the background of the post-dinner discussion, they noted that Hizballah flags were displayed everywhere, on

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bulldozers, cars, pallets of humanitarian supplies, etc. The moral victory of Hizballah is so overwhelming that "nothing else matters," Khoury lamented. They suspected that the movement of IDPs home was not as spontaneous as had been initially reported. Surely, Hamadeh said, Hizballah had encouraged people to move home, to give a sense of victory and to provide cover to Hizballah fighters remaining.

"THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY  
. . . IS NOT MY FRIEND"

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¶13. (S/NF) Jumblatt then launched into sharp criticism of Israel's actions during the month-long conflict. By shutting down the airport and making Lebanese ministers "beggars" for transportation to international conferences such as Rome, the Israelis made the GOL appear impotent. Government ministers had to focus entirely on the delivery of essentials, such as fuel, giving them no time to shore up their political house for the inevitable showdown with Hizballah. The Israelis engaged in "wishful thinking" in believing that imposing hardship on the entire Lebanese population would turn them against Hizballah. Instead, the hatred for Israel is now intense, and there is begrudging respect for Hizballah "everywhere." (Note: We see this phenomenon even with long-term Embassy FSNs. End note.)

¶14. (S/NF) Israel "doesn't learn," Jumblatt lamented, saying that GOI actions had so weakened state institutions and state authority -- never much to begin with, the two ambassadors pointed out -- that they have "turned Siniora into Abu Mazen." "Didn't they learn anything from Palestine?" Nasrallah now appears to be a hero in Lebanon and beyond. Asked by Emie and Ambassador Feltman what in his view the Israelis should have done, Jumblatt said that the ground offensive of the last couple of days of the conflict had a higher chance of success than the airstrikes that terrified all Lebanese. Jumblatt pointed to the continued closure of the airport as another sign that Israel "still doesn't get it." Hizballah is permitted to declare victory,

send its people down south, wave flags all over Beirut and the south, usher the Israelis out of Lebanon on little more than a promise to cooperate with the LAF, yet the GOL isn't allowed to open the airport. Jumblatt acknowledged that he wasn't entirely comfortable with security management of the airport, but the political necessity of opening it outweighed "minor" security concerns compared to the security issues associated with the Syrian-Lebanese border.

#### URGING UNITY AGAINST HIZBALLAH'S MESSAGE

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¶15. (S/NF) Emie and Ambassador Feltman tried to get Jumblatt, Hamadeh, and Khoury to focus on how to convey a reassuring message about the need to build a state and the need for the state to have primacy, per the Taif accord, Siniora's 7 points, the recent clerics' statement, and so on. Most Lebanese, now frightened of civil war, would find a message of unity and state-building reassuring, the ambassadors predicted. Surely, through unity, Lebanese politicians can subtly refute the messages being sent by Nasrallah. Jumblatt agreed that, if the Sunnis, Druse, and Christians would stand together, Nasrallah might think twice about a confrontation. But he then lashed out at Michel Aoun (still in bed with Nasrallah) as well as the March 14 Christians and the Sunnis led by Saad Hariri. Opportunistic and interested in survival, the March 14 Maronites, he said, will soon start drifting back toward Syria, convinced that Syria is on the ascendency. And the Sunnis are just timid, afraid of that Sunni-Shia tensions will turn violent.

¶16. (S/NF) The Lebanese mused about what Parliament Speaker Berri's opinion of the Nasrallah speech might be. Berri was probably appalled, they agreed, given Berri's hope to rebuild his own political stature at the expense of Hizballah. But Berri would be too frightened by Nasrallah's speech to contemplate any kind of break with Hizballah in order to cooperate with the March 14 alliance. Nevertheless, they all agreed to try to gauge whether Berri might be a quiet ally in chipping away at the monolithic victory Nasrallah declared.

¶17. (S/NF) Before sneaking out of Hamadeh's apartment via a service stairway, Jumblatt vowed that he would "continue to tell the truth," even if no one joined him. But he doubted anyone would listen. And, he added, "I don't know how much

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longer I will be around," suggesting additional worries about death threats. His last question before disappearing down the darkened stairwell was to Ambassador Feltman: "whatever happened to my visa waiver?" he asked.

#### COMMENT

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¶18. (S/NF) One should not underestimate the impact of Nasrallah's words last night on the mood of the country here: the Shia and the pro-Syrians are now ecstatic with their so-called victory, and the pro-independence March 14 crowd is despondent. The despair expressed by Jumblatt, Hamadeh, and Khoury is shared by others we've contacted by phone. Many of our contacts seem almost paralyzed with fear of what Syria -- and Hizballah -- will do to respond to UNSCR 1701. (Our dinner host Marwan Hamadeh, after all, was the first victim of Syria's response to UNSCR 1559, although he survived -- barely -- the 10/1/04 car bomb attack against him.)

¶19. (S/NF) Certainly, the atmosphere here suggests that Hizballah and its allies are in the ascendency, while the GOL and March 14 descend into that box called irrelevance (according to some, joining Abu Mazen and others). We hope that this is a temporary phenomenon: as the Lebanese discover the real extent of the destruction to their country, surely the glow of Hizballah's "victory" will fade, especially if -- as we hope -- the March 14 crowd pulls itself together in favor of a unified message asking about whether the "victory" was worth the cost. We hope that the

moderate Arab states, which must have been as appalled as we were by Nasrallah's performance, are sending messages to Syria to knock off any nefarious plans and to Saad Hariri and Fouad Siniora to maintain steady nerves and courage in the weeks ahead.

¶20. (S/NF) But we have an immediate problem in need of a creative solution: as Nasrallah made clear in his speech, Hizballah does not intend to disarm, not even in the south. IDF withdrawal, LAF deployment, and UNIFIL expansion are proceeding despite Nasrallah's suggestion that disarmament equals sedition. We expect that Hizballah will bide its time for now, avoiding any incidents that might provoke strong Israeli retaliation. So, on the surface, all might look fine, in terms of security in the south. While the status quo ante is not being restored in any case -- LAF deployment to the south, for the first time in decades, is something we've long demanded -- the dangers Hizballah's arms pose to Israel and to the Lebanese state seem likely to remain. From the Lebanese perspective, Shebaa Farms is an essential element to solving this problem. But of course an Israeli withdrawal from Shebaa (if possible at all) would only take place after the very disarmament the Lebanese say they need Shebaa "liberation" in order to accomplish. We will see PM Siniora, Speaker Berri, and other political contacts in the days to come to get a better sense of the options facing Lebanon and facing UNSCR 1701 implementation.

FELTMAN